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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 19 January 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to draw your attention to the most recent terrorist attacks perpetrated against the citizens of Israel in the last week alone. We find ourselves with a window of opportunity in the Middle East, and those responsible for these attacks, as well as those who refuse to confront them, seem only to be working to close it.

On 18 January 2005, a Palestinian suicide bomber struck the Gush Katif Junction in the Gaza Strip, killing one Israeli and wounding eight more. The terrorist group Hamas proudly claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 17 January 2005, the Hizbullah terrorist organization detonated an explosive device near an Israeli bulldozer being used to clear explosives on the Israeli side of the Blue Line. This follows an incident on 14 January, when the Hizbullah detonated another explosive device in the same area in an attempt to target Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and yet another attack on 9 January 2005 (as detailed in document A/59/667-S/2005/14), when Captain Sharon Elmakayes was killed as a result of an explosive device planted by the Hizbullah. As we have documented before, Hizbullah, with the sponsorship of Syria and Iran, is seeking to destabilize the region and undermine any hopes of peace, and it is using the networks it has developed with Palestinian terrorist organizations operating in the West Bank and Gaza to achieve this end.

On 15 January 2005, the Israeli town of Sderot was once again the target of Palestinian Qassam rockets. As a result, 17-year-old Ella Abukasis was very critically injured and her 10-year-old brother, Tamir, whom she protected from the blast with her body, was also injured. As you know, the town of Sderot continues to be terrorized by incessant and indiscriminate rocket fire from Palestinian-controlled areas. The rockets have claimed numerous lives, including those of young children, injured many civilians and caused extensive damage. They have made living conditions in the city intolerable for many of its inhabitants.

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On 13 January 2005, shortly before the closing of the Karni goods crossing in the northern Gaza Strip, terrorists, using explosives, burst through to the Israeli side of the crossing and opened fire indiscriminately at Israeli civilians, including Israeli truck drivers that transport Palestinian goods to the Israeli market. As a result of the explosion and the gunfire, six Israeli civilians were killed, and five more were wounded. During the evacuation of the wounded, the Palestinian terrorists fired an apparent mortar shell that landed near Karni crossing in attempt to do more damage. The terrorist organization Hamas claimed responsibility for that attack.

It bears repeating that the operation of the Karni crossing is designed to ensure the movement of people and goods and enhance access to merchandise, business, food and basic necessities for the Palestinian population. Attacks such as these are the clearest evidence that Palestinian terrorists are determined to harm not just Israelis but the Palestinian people as well — they are the greatest single obstacle to peace.

As the Palestinian director of security at the Karni crossing point said, "if the attackers had the Palestinian interest in mind, and the food that comes in through the Karni crossing, I don't think they would have done it". Those who would blame Israel for the problems of access and unimpeded movement in Palestinian areas would do well to look at these kind of cynical and destructive acts of Palestinian terrorism that compel Israel to take defensive action.

As this gruesome list of terrorist acts shows, there is unfortunately little evidence that the new Palestinian leadership is serious about confronting Palestinian terrorism in accordance with their basic legal and moral obligations, including those in the very first clauses of phase I of the Road Map. The window of opportunity for progress in the peace process will quickly close if the Palestinian leadership does not live up to these elementary obligations.

It is clear that forces in the region, and within the Palestinian-controlled territories, seek to destroy any hopes of peace. It is incumbent on the Palestinian leadership, if it is serious about peace, to reject these forces and act to eliminate the terrorist infrastructure as it is obligated and equipped to do. Despite the toll in Israeli life claimed by these recent attacks, Israel continues to exercise restraint and hopes that the new Palestinian leadership will finally meet its obligations and adopt a policy of zero tolerance for terrorism. Israel is ready to engage in a serious effort to renew the peace process and live up to its own obligations, but it will not and it cannot tolerate a situation in which Palestinian leaders speak of peace and abide terror at the same time. In the continued absence of genuine and uncompromising Palestinian efforts to eradicate the Palestinian terrorist campaign, Israel will be compelled to take the necessary defensive measures to bring an end to the killing of its civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Israel calls upon the international community to reaffirm its absolute rejection of terrorist tactics and to accept nothing less than the complete dismantling of terrorist organizations, as well as unyielding efforts to prevent terrorism and bring its perpetrators and supporters to justice, in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1373 (2001), as well as the Road Map. To delay such actions is a direct and immediate threat to the fragile hopes of peace that have been rekindled in the region.

I submit the present letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism launched in September 2000, which document the crimes for which the terrorists and their supporters must be held fully accountable.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 148, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Ambassador Dan **Gillerman**
Permanent Representative